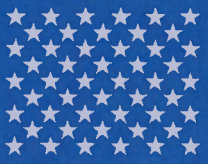
The American Experience



Radio Priest

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Radio Priest

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At the height of the Depression, Father Charles Coughlin was almost as popular as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Millions of Americans listened every Sunday to the "radio priest" as he led a popular protest against the nation's economic and social system. "Radio Priest" is a portrait of an extraordinary personality, interwoven with the story of the rise of radio and search for security in the darkest days of the Depression.

INTRODUCTION

FATHER CHARLES COUGHLIN
God hates a hypocrite.

MARY SCHUTLES
You forgot there was a depression and you forgot that you had to stand in line to get your food.

FATHER COUGHLIN
There so called Democrats and Republicans.

WALLACE STEGNER
Time were ripe for a demagogue and Father Coughlin was one.

FATHER COUGHLIN
...and now we're on our own.

NARRATOR
Tonight, on THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE: "The Radio Priest."

FATHER COUGHLIN
...to restore America to the Americans.

DAVID MCCULLOUGH
Good evening, I'm David McCullough.

The most painful era in our nation's history was the Great Depression of the 1930s. In Kentucky, coal miners and their families were living on weeds. As a small boy in Pittsburgh I saw tramps begging at the back door for food. When a single automobile plant closed in Detroit, 75,000 men lost their jobs. There were no unemployment benefits to fall back on then, no Social Security. If you were out of work, that was it, and at one point there were 13 million out of work.

Herbert Hoover got the blame. But no one person caused it and there were no easy answers. Some men claimed to have them, however, and desperate times, and desperate people, gave rise to a string of homegrown demagogues.

A demagogue is somebody who gets power by playing on emotions and prejudices.

Tonight's film, "The Radio Priest," is about one such figure, Father Charles Coughlin.

NARRATOR
New York City, May 22, 1935, in the sixth year of the Great Depression.

It was a moment in the American experience of national confusion, and soul-searching, a time for visionaries and for demagogues; a time when the crowd was drawn to Madison Square Garden not by a concert or sporting event, not by a president--but by a priest.

NEWSREEL HEADLINE:
Father Coughlin Invades East! New Yorkers hear Detroit priest in Garden. Twenty thousand pay $17,000 as social justice advocate widens drive.

NEWSREEL

Narration: **New York turns out eighteen thousand strong for a glimpse of Detroit's famous radio orator, Father Charles E. Coughlin. Regardless of whether they agree with him or not, they're here to see one of the outstanding figures in the public spotlight today.**

RADIO BROADCAST

Father Charles Coughlin: **The banker is demanding that he retain his customary standard of living while he forces the laboring men of America by his cruel exploitation unto a wage level, and a standard level, that is just this side of the Bolshevik.**

NARRATOR
Father Coughlin called on Americans to take a stand, for God and for country.

RADIO BROADCAST

Father Charles Coughlin: **I ask you in the name of Christianity, which abhors Communism, in the name of patriotism which loved America, to carry it on to victory. I ask you if you will rise in your**

Father Charles Coughlin (cont'd): **places and pledge with me to restore America to the Americans.**

NARRATOR
Few voices in that troubled decade would sound so promising to so many Americans--or so threatening.

In growing numbers, Americans had awakened early in this century to great expectations--of their country and of themselves.

If there was a vision of America, of the way life was supposed to be in the 1930s, it was this.

"DAWN TO SUNSET" NEWSREEL

Narration: **As the sun stretches fingers of light across the pavements, the early morning sparkles with the greeting of men to men, on their way to factories in Flint and Atlanta, from Tarrytown to Oakland. Along the roads to the factories...**

NARRATOR
There's no consensus on what caused the Depression, only that it was a national crisis without precedent.

NEWSREEL HEADLINES:
Jobless Town! Unemployed colony camps in empty New York City reservoir.

NARRATOR
Billions of dollars, thousands of businesses and farms, and a nation's sense of direction were lost.

NEWSREEL HEADLINES:
Chicago, Ill.--Wood-paved street ripped up by needy, as fuel for winter.

NARRATOR
When asked if there'd ever been anything like the Depression, the economist

NARRATOR (Continued)
John Maynard Keynes replied, "Yes, the Dark Ages, and it lasted four hundred years."

NEWSREEL HEADLINES:
In New York--Franciscan Friars dole nickels to homeless and hungry for bed or bread.

WALLACE STEGNER, Author
Those times were so bad they were like a catastrophe, like a typhoon or a hurricane or a tornado. Everybody was simply bewildered, and I think probably the bewilderment, after a year or two, after about 1932 or '33 became, in many cases, a really dull flaming anger--the world can't do this to me.

NARRATOR
The world seemed out of control. What man hadn't wrought, nature had. Dust storms brought a blizzard of despair and discontent.

MILO RENO, Farm Leader
Our organization is the last hope of the American farmer for independence. It is fighting the battle that will determine the issue as to whether the farmer shall become a peasant, the menial slave of the usurers and the industrialists, or whether he will maintain the birthright he inherited from his father.

NARRATOR
Inequities bred causes, and confrontation.

Man #1: **We're going to bring our union into Monroe. And we're going to make men out of those hoodlums that say they'll drive us out and keep us out of the City of Monroe, Michigan.**

NARRATOR
In the turmoil and disorder, there was fear, and reaction.

Man #2: **The National Guard has been ordered into active service by our governor for the purpose of maintaining law and order in San**

Man #2 (cont'd): **Francisco, and protecting life and property. This we propose to do at any cost.**

NARRATOR
America wasn't at peace with itself, and many Americans were ready to believe without question the claims of confident voices--like Father Coughlin's.

FATHER CHARLES COUGHLIN
I know history. I know how to interpret events at least in some small degree, and I know that it is better to stir up the people for the injustice that is perpetrated against them by industry and finance, rather than cast all the past upon the throw of the dice of fortune. Oh I am not proud if I have prophesied that democracy is in danger and that dictatorship at least has cast its shadow upon our flag.

NEAL SHINE, Senior Managing Editor, Detroit Free Press
The priest was the person who came to your house for a sick call, and he was the person who consoled you in your grief and shared your joy of weddings and baptisms with you. But he wasn't on the radio talking to millions of people every day, blasting governments and ethnic groups and religions and making charges and making accusations. And, you know, I think he was an absolute departure from anything that we had seen in this country. A priest with the collar of the Roman church on a platform screaming.

RADIO BROADCAST

Father Charles Coughlin: **Oh I wonder why the Baruchs, the Warburgs, the Morgans, and the kept men...oh, the nation is wise.**

NARRATOR
Bankers, for one, heard the raised voice of the radio priest. So did a restless audience with reason to distrust a system that, for many of them, had failed.

RADIO BROADCAST

Father Charles Coughlin: **This is what I so often refer to as the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. This is the system of modern**

Father Charles Coughlin (cont'd): **capitalism, which from governmental analysis, proves beyond dispute or question that in it there is no just sharing of profits in this nation.**

Remember that you're an American first. Remember that you're only Democrats or Republicans or progressives or partisans second.

NARRATOR
By 1936, he commanded a following that couldn't be ignored--not by politicians, nor by the media.

"MARCH OF TIME" NEWSREEL

Narration: **As another presidential election approaches, a Roman Catholic priest, for the first time in American history is seriously involved in national politics.**

RADIO BROADCAST

Father Charles Coughlin: **...unpopular, but God hates a hypocrite.**

"MARCH OF TIME" NEWSREEL

Narration: **At his Shrine of the Little Flower near Detroit, converge elements of a mighty political power--a power that grows with every name added to the 12 million already in his letter files--with every handshake that adds another individual to his colossal following which has welded into the most potent political lobby this country has ever known, the single-voiced National Union for Social Justice.**

NEAL SHINE
It's easy to appeal to a mass audience, especially when you've got something to sell. And he was selling, and he was selling hope. He was selling a new deal for them, without ever calling it that. You know, a

NEAL SHINE (Continued)
distribution of the wealth, a fair shake for the people who don't have it, against these bloodsuckers, these Communists. And God, we were afraid of the Communists. We knew what they were. They were godless. And you could tell somebody in that era, in those conditions, that somebody was godless, saying nothing else about them. We knew what they were.

WALLACE STEGNER, Author
People were ripe for somebody with answers. And a lot of people tried to have answers, but his were persuasive at the time because he was looking for the causes of unemployment. He was looking for the causes of social injustice. He had demons and evildoers that he could point fingers at and they got more and more specific as he went on, as you know, and became ultimately those international Jewish Communist bankers.

TED WIGREN, Shrine of the Little Flower Parish
Again though, we're going back into the Depression when people were really waiting for a messiah of some sort. And he had a lot of good thoughts, if you read any of his old things that he said--very much the champion of the underdog, very much.

MONSIGNOR EDWARD J. HICKEY, Chancellor Retired, Detroit Archidocese
I think you couldn't be neutral to Father Coughlin. I think you had to be with him, or against him.

NARRATOR
The gospel, according to Charles Coughlin, had its beginnings in Canada, where he was born, educated and ordained. In the early 1920s, he crossed the border to Detroit, a parish priest who loved politics, and Shakespeare.

The Shrine of the Little Flower would be his stage, but he had to build it himself.

Even then he was thinking big. For a working class suburb, which included only twenty-five Catholic families, he built a church to hold six hundred people.

He was thirty-four when his church doors opened in 1926, a time and place when a young priest had to fight his own battles. His first was with the Ku Klux Klan.

If there are turning points in the lives of public figures, this was Father Coughlin's.

"MARCH OF TIME" NEWSREEL

Housekeeper: **Father Coughlin! Father Coughlin!**

NARRATOR
The historic moment was recreated by the March of Time newsreel, using a stand-in for Coughlin himself, a sequence never shown in its entirety.

Father Charles Coughlin: **Bigots! Bigots! Bigots! They want a fight, I'll give them one by radio. Sermons over the radio from my church. Somehow I'll get the money to do it.**

NARRATOR
It's as if he'd looked into the ashes and divined the future. The miracle of the age would be his salvation. All of America was turning to the radio.

It was the start of a revolution in mass communication. The radio became America's most importance piece of furniture. In the Depression, as never before, bad news traveled fast.

Newsreel dialogue: **Columbia calling Berlin. Columbia calling Berlin. Come in Berlin.**

NARRATOR
Increasingly, what we heard defined the reality of our lives--and the ways in which we sought comfort, and escape.

RADIO BROADCAST

The Green Hornet: **Cato, it must be done. Mrs. Bennett is going to hear from the Green Hornet.**

Rudy Vallee Show: **"My Time is Your Time, Your Time is My Time."**

Helen Trent: **Once again, we bring you "The Romance of Helen Trent," who sets out to prove for herself that because a woman is thirty-five or more, romance in life need not be over.**

The Shadow: **Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men.**

Will Rogers: **Don't be scared and start turning off your radio. I'm not advertising or trying to sell you anything.**

NARRATOR
By the early thirties, comedy and adventure had to compete with the drama of the radio priest. Coughlin made it to the top of the ratings, and into the fan magazines.

SONG: "DEEP IN A DREAM"

I dim all the lights and I sink in my chair.
The smoke from my cigarette climbs through the air.
The walls of my room fade away in the blue.
Deep in a dream of you.

NARRATOR
Radio held out the promise of opportunity, of celebrity and riches. Other religious voices were bound to be heard.

RADIO BROADCAST

Aimee Semple McPherson: **Stop, you're drifting away from the father of your fathers. You're drifting away from prayer, drifting away from the Bible readings, drifting away from the family altar. And only ruin...**

NARRATOR
When evangelist Aimee McPherson came to save Broadway, it was hard to tell a sermon from an audition.

Aimee Semple McPherson singing: **Give me a burden for souls, Lord. Give me a love for the lost.**

Father Divine: **Peace Everyone!**

NARRATOR
Father Divine was on radio and on Broadway, cast by his followers in the role of God.

It wasn't an old-fashioned religious war. The stakes became even greater than that, a ratings war.

Man: **The world's youngest evangelist and preacher.**

Child evangelist: **How many want to give the devil a punch in the nose, a black eye, and twist his tail?**

NARRATOR
Inevitably, station managers had to make decisions. In Philadelphia, CBS asked its listeners to choose between the popular New York Philharmonic and the radio priest. By 187,000 votes to 12,000, Sunday afternoon at 4:00 went to Coughlin.

RADIO BROADCAST

Father Charles Coughlin: **I am in deadly earnest. In no way do I decide tonight, or any other time, to show a lily-livered flag before those who hold power. They may hold power over politicians, but they hold no power over a pulpit of a Catholic church that dares preach for the alleviation of misery, free from the sins of the past and free from the excesses of the future. God be with you. God be with all of us in this fight that shall last until death comes if necessary, rather than till surrender bids us put up a white flag. Good night and God bless you.**

JACQUELINE MILLS, Shrine of the Little Flower Parish
Dynamic! He had the most dynamic voice I think I've ever heard. The most powerful voice I've ever heard. I think he could wake up the dead, it was that powerful.

PHILIP SLOMOVITZ, Editor Retired, Detroit Jewish Chronicle
I think people stopped to listen to Coughlin and to exchange views about Coughlin. Isn't this a remarkable personality? He speaks of social justice. He's a great human being. And that was the impression in many

PHILIP SLOMOVITZ (Continued)
quarters. People did stop on Sunday afternoon, on WJR he was the dominant factor.

MARY SCHULTES
People were always waiting for that day to come, when they would sit down and listen to him. Because he had such a soothing voice that you forgot you were poor, you forgot there was a Depression and you forgot that you had to stand in line to get your food.

WALLACE STEGNER
It had a caressing quality, a persuasive quality, a fatherly reassuring kind of quality just when people needed reassurance. There was something in that voice which said "I am the resurrection and the life."

NARRATOR
Something in that voice inspired faith. A radio poll named Coughlin the nation's most useful citizen of 1933.

"The Fighting Priest" had become a beacon of trust, of leadership, even a movie.

"FIGHTING PRIEST" NEWSREEL

Narration: **This is the Fisher Building, Detroit, from whose tower, the home of radio station WJR, have emanated many of the broadcasts of the Rev. Charles E. Coughlin--the voice of thought and sympathy from the heart of Michigan's greatest city. As the clocks in Detroit chime "four," and those throughout the rest of the country chime their corresponding hours, some 30 million listeners gather at their radios to hear the voice of the Rev. Charles E. Coughlin, the fighting priest, as he greets them with his cheery..**

Father Charles Coughlin: **Good afternoon, my friends. During the course of this address, it will be my privilege to disclose information which seldom levels down through ordinary channels to the general public. It is my duty as your spokesman, to present it to you in this**

Father Charles
Coughlin (cont'd): emergency to the end that it will guide you in your decisions, and stimulate you in your actions.

NEIL SHINE
He was on, what, forty or fifty stations. He was reaching millions of people. He couldn't have done that stumping. He couldn't have done that in huge coliseums. He had access to the people, he had access to them in their kitchens, and that's where the little Motorolas were. And they sat there and they listened.

WALLACE STEGNER
I seem to remember somewhere that somebody estimated that at the height of his popularity he was talking sometimes to an audience of 45 million, which is incredible in those days. I mean, that outdoes anything I think in contemporary television.

NARRATOR
It was becoming a familiar story--twice on the cover of Newsweek. Coughlin had built his church. Now he was building a movement.

MARY SHULTES, Shrine of the Little Flower Parish
On Sunday, Father Coughlin would speak from the tower, and people from miles around would come and stand on the grounds of the church, to listen to him talk. There were visitors, all religions. It didn't make no difference what religion they were, but they all enjoyed to hear him.

JACQUELINE MILLS
Oh yes, they came by the busloads. And tours. It was like Disneyland in a way. That was the place to go. And somebody would touch him or they would shake his hand, and they could go back home and they could tell everybody "I shook his hand, I touched him," you know. This is the impact he had. It was like touching the Pope.

MARILYN CONWAY, Shrine of the Little Flower Parish
The volume of mail was so large that they had to put a post office in Royal Oak. And that is how we got the Royal Oak post office.

NEWSREEL HEADLINES:
PRIEST GET MILLION LETTERS ON RADIO TALKS. Father Coughlin of Shrine of the Little Flower Parish, Royal Oak, Michigan, presents staff that handles correspondence. Back to Work on the Fan Mail, Pathe News.

WALLACE STEGNER
And he didn't ask for much. He asked for a dollar bill in an envelope. You put your dollar bill in an envelope and it came out ultimately at $20,000 a week or whatever he was collecting there.

NEAL SHINE
I would, at the risk of what remains of my chances for eternal salvation, compare him with the televangelists of today because he was a forerunner of all that.

NARRATOR
In the worst of the Depression, Father Coughlin was spending thousands of dollars a week to broadcast over his own network.

By radio and by mail, he'd assembled the biggest flock in the history of Christianity.

He'd done it without any clear political affiliation or program, his platform a political stew of contradictions. He was for and against the capitalist system, for and against Roosevelt and the New Deal, for and against the demands of labor.

The radio priest could be many things, to many people, and it paid off.

NEAL SHINE
I don't think any of those old people then thought he was getting rich, but he was. He was getting a lot of money. He was getting 400,000 letters a week coming to his radio program and people stuck money in it to help support it.

NARRATOR
In money orders alone, he cashed a half million dollars at the tiny Royal Oak post office in less than two years. Along with money, Coughlin was raising controversy.

While advocating that silver replace the gold standard, he had a secretary invest in silver futures.

NARRATOR (Continued)
While denouncing Wall Street, he kept his own account at Paine Webber.

JACQUELINE MILLS
He lived extremely well. They say he had a personal income and that he made some wise investments. How do you know where a person like Father Coughlin gets his money? I'm sure people donated a lot of money. I don't know where all that money went to.

NARRATOR
In Depression America, money was the subject of the hour, and a regular topic of the radio priest. He didn't make sense to everyone. He didn't have to.

NEWSREEL HEADLINE:
FATHER COUGHLIN SPEAKS, Washington, D.C.

RADIO BROADCAST

Father Charles Coughlin: **I know that everyone in this audience is of one mind on this point--that we want more democracy in financial matters and less plutocracy in matters of exploitation.**

For at the bottom of this Depression it's a money question. At the bottom of poverty, of unemployment, of confiscation, it's a money question.

In 1776, Washington and Jefferson and their compatriots had hurled at them, lies and charges and the epithet of "revolutionary". Their lands were overtaxed, their laborers and farmers had been exploited, their liberties had been denied, their right to free speech and to petition had been scoffed at. They were called "revolutionary"--so are you.

NARRATOR
If he was campaigning for fame and power, he'd surely found one, and the other seemed within reach.

NARRATOR (Continued)
Surrounded by the flag and loyal supporters, Coughlin suddenly appeared with all the trappings--and gestures--of a candidate for office.

Style counted as much as substance. For Coughlin, what counted most was an agenda that challenged not just the politics of the Depression but the patriotism of anyone who disagreed--anyone.

RADIO BROADCAST

Father Charles Coughlin: **There is written in the Constitution of the United States that Congress has the right to coin, issue, and regulate the value of money. That's good Americanism, and it's good enough for me.**

Every politician today in the Democratic or Republican ranks who sits upon one of the thrones of the mighty doesn't believe in that part of the Constitution. They don't want to believe in that part of the Constitution. They're not even Americans, these so-called Democrats and Republicans.

They might say that's radical, but the real radical is the Simon Legree of high finance who turns his lash about your shoulders and exploits from your pocketbook its last penny.

NARRATOR
The tone had become menacing, even to presidents.

RADIO BROADCAST

Father Charles Coughlin: **We tried to keep cool with Cal. We tried to become hard-boiled with Harding. We tried to stay out of war with Woodrow, and we tried to write a New Deal with Franklin Delano.**

We're through with the sham battle of politicians, and now we're on our own.

Therefore, under your congressional district presidents, form your battalions, take up the shield of your defense, unsheath the sword of

Father Charles Coughlin (cont'd): **your truth, and carry on in Illinois so that the Communists on the one hand cannot scourge us, and that the modern capitalists on the other cannot plague us.**

NARRATOR
Now an imposing figure on the political horizon, his religious calling had given way to a secular crusade.

MONSIGNOR EDWARD J. HICKEY
Well, I hoped he would stay to teaching the children religion. I hoped he didn't get too involved in controversies that got him rather in extreme positions. I hoped that he wouldn't be tempted to call the president of our country by insulting names.

NEAL SHINE
The one thing that was important to the people who were listening, especially the Catholics, was that he was a priest, and that he spoke with the church's authority. And if he wasn't speaking with the church's authority, why the hell were they letting him speak and say these things?

"MARCH OF TIME" HEADLINE:
The Roman Catholic Church can no longer ignore the political activities of Father Coughlin.

NARRATOR
In fact, Father Coughlin's political career was ringing bells of alarm inside the Catholic Church.

"MARCH OF TIME" NEWSREEL

Narration: **In Boston, revered old Cardinal O'Connell contemptuously refers to the Coughlin speeches as "hysterical addresses" and "demagogic stuff". New York's Cardinal Hayes says nothing, but his expert on canon law announces that Father Coughlin has no business in politics. But in the Roman Catholic Church a priest is answerable only to his immediate superior, and Father**

"MARCH OF TIME" NEWSREEL

Narration (cont'd): **Coughlin's superior is his staunchest ally, sixty-eight year-old Bishop Gallagher.**

Bishop Gallagher: **Father Coughlin has preached no heresy. I shall not interfere.**

MONSIGNOR EDWARD J. HICKEY
There was danger Father Coughlin was in a stronger position probably at that time than Martin Luther had been centuries earlier. If he had 30 million listeners, if he could probably change a national election or have a good chance to, though his effort was futile, I think that the church felt it's dangerous for him to have that much backing.

WALLACE STEGNER
The times were ripe for a demagogue and Father Coughlin was one of several who played on the Depression. I suspect if we had a depression again of anything like that magnitude, we would have demagogues to rise out of it, like tadpoles out of a swamp.

NARRATOR
As the "March of Time" saw it, the swamp was filled with unlikely creatures seeking the political mainstream.

"MARCH OF TIME" NEWSREEL

Narration: **Barnstorming up and down the nation today are the self-annointed messiahs of several new political minorities,the so-called "lunatic fringe" of the U.S. electorate.**

Gerald L.K. Smith: **God, let me be a rabblerouser. I see chaos approaching, and our people are hungry. Why shouldn't the cream of the population enjoy the cream of the nation's wealth? End Communism.**

NARRATOR
Among them a Protestant preacher and professional agitator: the Rev.Gerald L.K. Smith.

Gerald L.K. Smith: **I get my inspiration from the sky.**

NARRATOR
However inspired, a coalition was born.

NEWSREEL HEADLINE:
With Dr. Townsend in tow, Gerald Smith storm two wild Cleveland conventions--the Townsendites and the Coughlinites.

NEWSREEL

Narration: **Side by side for the first time stand the leaders of the lunatic fringer: Gerald Smith still claiming the support of 10 million Share-Our-Wealthers, Dr. Townsend boasting of 5 million follows, Father Coughlin estimating his strength at 9 million voters.**

NARRATOR
An ally of the assassinated Huey Long, Smith stepped forward to give his blessing.

Gerald L.K. Smith: **These great phenomenal assemblies, whether they be headed by Dr. Francis E. Townsend, Gerald Smith, or Father Charles E. Coughlin represent the unmistakable edict that is being issued to the corrupt, thieving politicians of America, that the baby-havin', stump-grubbin', sod-bustin', go-to-meetin', god-fearin' American people are about to take over the United States Government of America.**

NARRATOR
The parson from Louisiana could inflame the crowd. Dr. Townsend's old-age pension plan could comfort the crowd. But its leader was the radio priest of Royal Oak.

Man: **Godspeed in your new office, Father Coughlin.**

NARRATOR
He stood now at the head of his own organization, the National Union for Social Justice.

Father Charles Coughlin: **Ladies and Gentlemen. At last the common people have got together.**

NARRATOR
It wasn't a political party but the instrument of his political ambitions, a bold attempt to become a power broker in the 1936 presidential election.

He had a candidate, a North Dakota congressman named William Lemke. He had money. He had his own newspaper, Social Justice weekly. He had a huge audience. What Coughlin didn't have were the votes.

Announcer: **Colorado shows Roosevelt 2000, Landon 1400.**

NARRATOR
Neither did Alf Landon, the Republican candidate. They heard the news of the biggest electoral landslide the country had known, on the radio.

H.V. Kaltenborn: **A news flash. Ladies and gentlemen, Roosevelt is re-elected.**

NARRATOR
President Roosevelt's New Deal had both inspired and infuriated an anxious nation.

Despite FDR's overwhelming victory, the anxieties wouldn't go away. As he sat down in 1937 to begin a second term, neither would his opponents.

In Royal Oak, the radio priest prepared for a new season on more stations than ever before. And, more than ever before, he preached a politics of fear.

RADIO BROADCAST

Father Charles Coughlin: **There is nothing standing between our children and their enslavement to the fanatical regime of the Soviets except the cross of Christ, and the principles of social justice.**

Mr. Roosevelt is notorious for his unbounded friendship for the Bolsheviks of Soviet Russia.

The hour's struck for you to take the offensive against the Bolsheviks in our midst--the pinks, the reds, the radicals.

Why in our colleges and schools, in our pulpits and in our government, Communism has taken hold today.

Clean out the Augean stables of labor that have been dirtied and defiled by Communist leadership. Clean them out!

NEWSREEL HEADLINE :
Chicago, Ill.--20,000 UNEMPLOYED LED BY REDS IN MONSTER RELIEF CUT PROTEST

NARRATOR
It wasn't the first "red scare" in American politics, and it wouldn't be the last.

In the thirties, political tremors were being felt along an ideological faultline that ran from extreme right to extreme left.

One of Coughlin's earliest political sermons was Chris or Communism.

For some, the only thing to fear--was a revolution, a view formally endorsed by a Congressional committee.

REP. HAMILTON FISH, Retired
Although I am no alarmist and do not anticipate any revolution in this country this yeqar or next year from Communist sources, I do believe that their seditious activities and those of all of our enemies from within are far more serious to the welfare of our people and the maintenance of our

REP. HAMILTON FISH (Continued)
republican form of government than all our possible enemies from without.

NARRATOR
At a time when, in the name of Americanism, Father Coughlin could fill the seats in Madison Square Garden, so could American Communists, with the same appeal to national frustration and tradition.

EARL BROWDER, American Communist Party Leader
Americans have always been among the most revolutionary peoples of the world. Americans will not shrink from a new revolution when they understand that only by this road can they once and for all break the corrupting power of Wall Street over our land. It is an unwilling testimony to the correctness of the Communist Party when we declare that the main issue is democracy or fascism in America.

NEWSREEL HEADLINE:
AIR U.S. NAZI MOVEMENT! Militant anti-Jewish groups gain throughout country! Expose of wide propaganda campaign made by Raymond F. Moley, editor of "Today".

NARRATOR
Fascism was another great fear, and attraction of the 1930s.

Raymond Moley, Journalist: **During this last week of March, 1934 troops bearing a foreign uniform have been drilling in nineteen American cities. This membership card of the Friends of the New Germany bears the shield of the United States, over which has been placed the Nazi emblem. Hitlerism has invaded America.**

NARRATOR
Camp Siegfried: not Germany, but Long Island, New York.

WALLACE STEGNER
Which way is the United States going to go? Is it going to go Communist or is it going to go fascist? It's got to go one way or the other. You really felt a great pressure to choose up sides and take one side or the

WALLACE STEGNER (Continued)
other, and a lot of people quite seriously though, well, fascism is better than communism.

NARRATOR
If not thunder on the extreme right, there was a rumbling, an incessant drumbeat.

The German-American Bund marched into Madison Square Garden with its own version of Americanism, and with its own American heroes, and villains.

Fritz Kuhn, German-American Bund Leader: **Ladies and gentlemen, you all have heard of me, through the Jewish-controlled press, as as creature with horns, a cloven hoof and a long tail.**

But no, my friends, the press, the radio, and the cinema are in the hands of the Jews, and like Father Coughlin.

NARRATOR
And one of its heroes was the radio priest.

Fritz Kuhn: **And like Father Coughlin.**

Woman: **God bless Father Coughlin.**

NEAL SHINE
It was time for demagogues across the world and demagoguery. It was a time when in Germany, they needed a Hitler and maybe Coughlin felt that they needed a Charlie Coughlin here.

WALLACE STEGNER
Think of all the Italians who went around calling, "Duce, Duce, Duce..." You know. And think of all those people who listened to the harangues of Hitler and Goebbels on the air as we all listened to them. They made my hair stand on end, but a lot of Germans were listening and cheering. Not all Germans by any means, but a lot of them. And in the same way, in this country, people were listening to the demagogues who made use of the Depression for disastrous ends.

NARRATOR
It was one of the tragedies of the Depression. For some among the dispossessed, the solution wasn't what to do but who to blame. By the late thirties, Coughlin knew who they were.

RADIO BROADCAST

Father Charles Coughlin: **The system of international finance which has crucified the world to the cross of Depression was evolved by Jews for holding the peoples of the world under control.**

This official paper prints the names of the Jewish bankers who helped to finance the Russian Revolution.

I was shocked that the resources of this nation should be employed against the Hitler government on behalf of German Jews to settle an internal problem in Germany.

What though they accuse you of starving of the multitudes. What though they maintain that you consort with sinners, be they Nazis, or anti-Semetic, or what not...

And if we must accept Jewish leadership, that leadership will be identified with Jesus Christ, whom the Jews repudiated.

Oh the courageous Christians of America will not be intimidated by name-calling such as anti-Semetic or by threats of investigation or by a prejudiced press.

MARILYN CONWAY
Well if I went into the whole anti-Semitic thing, I would take up a whole week and I have my facts and figures but I don't want to get into it. He was not anti-Semitic, he was anti-Jewish. He was anti-banker.

TED WIDGREN
Well he always told me he liked Jews, but he didn't like kikes. And I think that's the same as saying, of any derogatory thing about perhaps an

TED WIDGREN (Continued)
Italian being called a dago or a wop. It's the same comparison. But he was always against the international Jew, the international banker.

Father Charles Coughlin: **The National Union for Social Justice was readily conceived and was also entertained in my mind as an essential to help save America for the Americans. At that date, ladies and gentlemen, you had challenged me by millions of your letters, on that date I appeared before a microphone and I accepted your challenge to organize for the purpose of our driving the money-changers...**

NARRATOR
Social justice. Deliverance from bankers and money-changers. It had sounded promising.

PHILIP SLOMOVITZ
When he spoke about driving out the money-lenders, he was primarily attached it to Franklin Roosevelt, to the administration he hated. And a lot of people believed--oh, he didn't mean the Jews. This is what he means to improve conditions in this country.

NEAL SHINE
I found out years later that the Jews were frightened by Coughlin. They were frightened by the talk, I mean, what was going on in Europe, they knew what was happening in Germany. They knew, and here was a man that was embracing Hitler, who was, I don't know who said that there was an amazing similarity between the things Coughlin was saying and the things Hitler was saying at the same time. The same phrases, the same harangues.

PHILIP SLOMOVITZ
While he said, I'm a friend of the Jews, and I'm not an anti-Semite, on every page of Social Justice you found anti-Semitism. In his radio addresses you had to detect it much more than you did in Social Justice.

NARRATOR
Social Justice, whose circulation reached as high as a million copies a week, did more than reprint Coughlin's sermons.

NARRATOR (Continued)
It reprinted the "Protocols of Zion," a faked document also used in Nazi Germany, claiming that Jews were plotting to take over the world.

According to Social Justice, Jews had financed the Russian revolution, and the fascist countries of Europe were simply one line of defense.

WALLACE STEGNER
Having read once for my sins, the whole file of Social Justice, it was full of vituperation against the Jews and you know, "The Protocols of Zion." All that old, old batch of lies came out in his speeches and in Social Justice. And the implication was always that one way to deal with this was with your good right arm.

TED WIDGREN
I don't know why they were so frightened of him unless they saw a danger to themselves. Hecks, there's people I don't like and I like. What are you going, I can't see why the big fear here unless they, what could Father Coughlin possibly do to the Jews, except turn somebody against them?

NARRATOR
In groups like the Silver Shirts, the possibility became a reality.

NEWSREEL

Narration: **This Los Angeles book store of the Silver Shirts dispensing anti-Jewish propaganda is one of many that have recently opened all over the country. Note the name: Aryan Bookstore, and nearby a newsboy shouts his wares. The Silver Legion Ranger, a propaganda newspaper.**

Boy: **Silve Ranger. Late paper. Free speech stopped by Jew riot. Late paper.**

NARRATOR
The politics of bigotry could include anti-Catholicism, as in the Black Legion--which had a chapter in Royal Oak, Michigan, but a message still familiar to Coughlin supporters.

Interviewer: Mr. Lupp, I understand that the Black Legion stands for pro-Americanism. Is that a fact?

Arthur Lupp, Michigan State Commander, Black Legion: That's right.

Interviewer: I understand also that it is opposed to Catholics, Jews and Negroes--is that a fact?

Arthur Lupp: Not the individual, but the activities of any subversive foreign groups.

Interviewer: Are not Catholics, Jews and Negroes Americans?

Arthur Lupp: As individuals, yes, but as an organized group, no. They are known in this country as a foreign body. It's been the policy of myself and all loyal Americans, to propound the pure doctrine of Americanism at all times--America for Americans.

NARRATOR
"America for Americans" had become a warning, a battle cry: for the Silver Shirts, for the Black Legion, and for Father Coughlin in the Christian Front.

RADIO BROADCAST

Father Charles Coughlin: I take my stand beside the Christian Frontiers.

I understand that units of the Christian Front have formed and are forming in New York City and elsewhere. Does that mean anything to you Bolsheviks?

It is time to eradicate them mentally, spiritually and physically from our...

Where do you stand? What do you plan to do?

NARRATOR
The extremism rejected by most of his listeners was embraced by thousands of Coughlin's more fanatical followers. In the rhetoric of the radio priest, they heard a call to arms.

RADIO BROADCAST

Father Charles Coughlin: We will fight you in Franco's way if necessary. Call this inflammatory. It is inflammatory. Rest assured we'll fight you and we'll win. From your ranks in the Church Militant. This America is Christ's America.

WALLACE STEGNER
The mix of religion and politics is always very volatile. It's like the mix of gasoline and oxygen, you know. In the proportions, you get different proportions and a different kind of firing. But it's always going to be there. I think there is a constant built-in conflict in the American system which tries to keep religion out of politics and then another impulse, a counter-impulse which is constantly trying to put it back in.

NARRATOR
One impulse was to parade Father Coughlin in effigy. As his extremism increased, his audience declined but never disappeared entirely. He remained a catalyst for strong emotions, still able to inspire the crowd to stand up--even if in opposition.

The Depression moved a great number of Americans to take a stand, to take to the streets, to follow the flag--arousing pride, and passion, and prejudice.

Most were good Americans: decent, and frightened, and vulnerable--their faith and their institutions being tested by the most painful decade the nation had known in this century.

By the early 1940's, Americans would be marching to war against fascism. Father Coughlin's public career would end. So would an era most Americans would like to forget.

But back in the midst of the Depression there was a moment in the American experience worth remembering: a summer afternoon in Cleveland, 1936--when, in a nation's desperation, so many seeking a leader found one in Charles Coughlin, the radio priest.

RADIO BROADCAST

Father Charles Coughlin: **The Depression still waxed strong as the powers of deflation reached out to confiscate homes, to capture farms and to keep that ever-marching army of jobless upon our streets, wondering when God in his mercy would lift his hand.**

I dared you and challenged you to organize, so that the people if not their president would drive the money-changers from the temple, and you did it.

NARRATOR
It was a time when even in a democracy with traditions of liberty and tolerance, millions were ready to follow a persuasive voice not always appealing to the best in us.

RADIO BROADCAST

Father Charles Coughlin: **You appreciate the fact, my dear friends, that among other things in the National Union for Social Justice, we are Christian insofar as we believe in Christ's principle of "love you neighbor as yourself", and with that principle I challenge every Jew in this nation to tell me that he does not believe in it.**

There is no need of communizing all the factories and the fields and the forests and the mines under a new kind of God made of flesh and blood and clay and hatred.

When men become so prideful that they believe their destiny is to rewrite the eternal law of God, it's time for their fellow citizens to raise up in their wrath and through the agency of ballots and not bullets to relegate them to the pages of the past.

God bless you.

NARRATOR
The radio priest was silenced by the Catholic Church in 1942. That same year, the government revoked the mailing privileges of Social Justice magazine.

Father Coughlin returned to his original calling and remained until his death, a parish priest.

DAVID MUCULLOUGH
For all that is so unsettling about a man like Father Coughlin, it's well to remember that tens of millions of Americans wanted no part of him or his message. Common sense and the democratic system prevailed, even in desperate times.

Coughlin himself lived on into the 1970s. Asked once if he would do anything different with his life, given the chance, he said no. Asked the question a little later, he said he would do nothing the same.

I'm David McCullough for THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE.

Radio Priest

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